

Mythical 71

Chapter 71: The Lu Family of Jiangdong

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With this powerful tool, Chen Xi was ready to lure those famous scholars from Yingchuan who had abandoned Yuan Shao and were planning to return home via Taishan. His goal was to capture them all in one go!

Lu Su and Chen Xi talked throughout the night, and the next day, Lu Su, with dark circles under his eyes, went to the administration hall. Liu Bei, with a joyful expression, handed the seal of the Governor of Taishan to Chen Xi, and then gave the seal of the Taishan Prefect, which Chen Xi had just removed, to Lu Su. The administrative handover was completed, and it seemed that Chen Xi had reached the peak of his official career.

With the bandit leaders in Taishan being persuaded to surrender by Zang Ba, those stubborn and ignorant fools who did not recognize the situation were ruthlessly dealt with by Guan Yu and Zhang Fei leading the new army. Taishan was now stabilized, and Guan Yu and Zhang Fei had also returned to Fenggao with their captured prisoners.

"Zijing, this is the number of cultivated lands for this year, the tax rates are with Zilong, and the grain supply to the central government. Calculate these and give me an approximate figure," Chen Xi said, planning the tasks for the autumn and winter seasons. He began handling the current administrative affairs, and similar to before, Chen Xi was only setting the personnel and general goals. The specifics were handled by others.

For instance, Lu Su was now the one truly doing the work, while Chen Xi merely gave instructions. He was very clear about his strengths—vision and experience—but not execution. Professional matters should be handled by professionals. Besides, it was evident that Lu Su was very satisfied with being entrusted with important responsibilities and wanted to demonstrate his abilities. So, Chen Xi continued assigning tasks to Lu Su, one of the Four Talents of Eastern Wu.

"How can you give an approximate figure? One must be one, and two must be two. Governance cannot be vague; this gives subordinates the opportunity to accept bribes," Lu Su sternly rejected Chen Xi's suggestion.

"Oh, I mean you only need to report a round figure. The rest will be used as subsidies for the elders, orphans, and widows during festivals. They also deserve support," Chen Xi casually came up with an excuse.

"After distributing these, the remaining part will be used as scholarships for our outstanding students next year. When those young scholars start learning, it means there's one less laborer in their families. Although the families would likely still support a scholar, I think it's more humane to provide some assistance," Chen Xi said, yawning, as he thought of various good ideas to boost his reputation.

"This method is excellent. But why don't you write a formal plan?" Lu Su nodded in agreement with the benefits of these measures but was curious why Chen Xi didn't document them.

"It's too simple. There's no need to waste paper," Chen Xi pulled out another reasonable excuse.

Chen Xi was right. Since paper began being used in the administration hall, Mi Zhu had been eyeing it. After getting Chen Xi's approval to sell it, especially exclusively in the south, Mi Zhu felt much more at ease. However, he still occasionally came to the administration hall to see if he could get more.

A few days ago, Chen Xi had had enough of his prepared paper mysteriously disappearing, so he gave Mi Zhu the exclusive rights to sell refined salt in the provinces of Yangzhou, Jingzhou, Yuzhou, and Xuzhou. He also gave him a letter to retrieve the salt from Su Shuang. By now, Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping should have produced enough salt to crush the competition from other major salt merchants.

Chen Xi didn't know that Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping, in their quest for speed, had only done preliminary refining, ignoring the detailed secondary refining process that Chen Xi had written down. To them, the preliminary refined salt was far superior to the dark, yellowish blocks of Sichuan rock salt and didn't have any off-taste, so they skipped the final step entirely.

In modern times, such shortcuts would have serious repercussions, but back then, even Chen Xi wouldn't have objected if he saw Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping doing this. When people were still using stones with a salty taste, what Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping did was genuinely beneficial. They sold the salt cheaply, which, by the prevailing moral standards, made them comparable to the benevolent merchants of the Spring and Autumn period.

Seeing that Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping were eating their own salt, what more could one say? If the producers themselves trusted their product, what more could the consumers want?

Chen Xi had no idea how much salt Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping had produced. Even if sold throughout the entire Han Dynasty, it would probably last until March next year. Skipping the final step made the production incredibly fast. Now, Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping were worried about how to transport all that salt.

"Reporting! From officer Mi Zhu, there is urgent business to report," a messenger ran over just as Chen Xi was assigning more tasks to Lu Su.

"Invite Officer Mi in," Chen Xi said, looking up with a slight frown.

"I wonder what brings Mi Zhu back so urgently," Lu Su said with a smile. "Chen Xi must be worried."

"Not really, just concerned that something has gone wrong in Qingzhou. That's the foundation of my plans for next year," Chen Xi shook his head.

"Wait, we have plans in Qingzhou?" Lu Su looked at Chen Xi in surprise. He hadn't heard of such a significant plan.

"Yes, it's part of my commercial strategy. I showed it to you before," Chen Xi pointed to a pile of documents, indicating that Lu Su had seen them.

"The salt industry?" Lu Su remembered Chen Xi mentioning developing the salt industry in Qingzhou.

"Yes, I suspect that's why Mi Zhu is back. Let's see if the news is good or bad. I haven't contacted Su Shuang recently," Chen Xi admitted.

"Greetings, Governor, Prefect," Mi Zhu hurried in, looking travel-worn. It was clear the matter was urgent, and even the usually composed Mi Zhu hadn't taken time to freshen up before rushing to see Chen Xi and Lu Su.

"No need for formalities, Mi Zhu. You seem in a hurry. Did something major happen in Qingzhou?" Chen Xi's face darkened. It had been his decision to focus on Qingzhou, and if something went wrong, it would reflect poorly on him.

Mi Zhu quickly recounted the situation, and Chen Xi felt somewhat relieved. Lu Su, on the other hand, was stunned. There was too much salt to transport, and they needed the help of the Lu family from Jiangdong, who were renowned shipbuilders. This was big money and crucial for Liu Bei's plans next year. This was indeed a grand scheme!

After Mi Zhu took Chen Xi's letter to Qingzhou, Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping, who were worried about transport, were overjoyed. They couldn't transport the salt themselves, but surely Mi Zhu, a master merchant, could. So, they assured Mi Zhu that salt was not an issue.

Mi Zhu was stunned to see Su Shuang allocate ten thousand dan of refined salt for him, with Su Shuang even saying that he could take the salt first and pay later since they were all working under Liu Bei. They didn't even need a deposit and would settle the account after making a profit, only charging a small handling fee.

Despite being a merchant, Mi Zhu had a noble demeanor. Seeing Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping worried about transportation, he offered to handle it. But when he saw the entire salt stockpile, he was dumbfounded. Transporting this much salt using conventional methods without attracting attention seemed impossible.

After much thought, Mi Zhu decided that sea transport was the only solution, avoiding prying eyes. He had connections with the Lu family of Jiangdong, known for their shipbuilding, but he needed Chen Xi's approval to involve them.